

CHANGING THE COURSE OF HISTORY

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To begin, let's rewind. Just over one hundred years ago, slavery and abuse toward people of colour was not only socially acceptable, it was legal in our country. It was okay to possess people. It was okay to whip and physically abuse a person until they were no longer able to stand. It was okay to work a person to death. Since the traumatizing days of the reality of slavery, Canada has come a long way and has made many astonishing accomplishments. Throughout the course of the past 150 years, there have been numerous people who have been successful in changing the course of history. There are an abundance of things that can be learned by the young generation of today through the accomplishments that black Canadians have made to our country. Although often times, the hard work and successes made by black Canadians are forgotten and simply overlooked by the people of today.

Born in Toronto, Ontario, Lincoln Alexander was the first black Member of Parliament in the House of Commons. Lincoln Alexander was the first Black Canadian to be appointed a vice regal position in Canada, which occurred on the 20th of September 1985 when he was sworn in as Ontario's 24th Lieutenant-Governor. Lincoln Alexander was a man who had a great passion for his country. By serving as an airman in the Royal Canadian Air Force, a Member of Parliament as well as a Minister of the Crown along with serving as the Lieutenant-Governor, it is more than evident that Alexander had an extreme commitment to service within his country. The Lincoln Alexander Act explains he is "an example of service, determination and humility. Always fighting for equal rights for all races in our society, and doing so without malice, he changed attitudes and contributed greatly to the inclusiveness and tolerance of Canada today."

Canadian politician, Rosemary Brown, was one of these people who were successful in changing the course of history. Brown has the recognition of being the first Canadian black female member of provincial legislature, along with being the first woman to run for leadership of a federal political party. In 1972, Rosemary Brown decided to enter politics with her province running as a New Democratic Member. Brown was successful in winning her campaign, which won her the title of being the first black woman to sit in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. In her fourteen years as a member of this party, she had excelled in forming committees and changes in the typical foreseen members of parliament. Some of these committees include removal of sexism in educational material, as well as committees to break colour barriers throughout the province. Fortunately, Brown's astonishing accomplishments were not disregarded. Rosemary Brown was awarded many important distinctions, such as the Order of British Columbia, the order of Canada, the United Nations Human Rights Fellowships along with fifteen doctorates from universities within Canada.

Despite changes in politics being a very vital part of Canadian history, there are also many great black Canadian athletes that deserve to be acknowledged. Harry Winston Jerome, a track and field Olympian from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan was the first man to share the world 100-yard and 100 meter records. At the young age of 18 years old, Jerome broke the Canadian record for the 220-yard sprint which had been held by athlete Percy Williams for a lingering 31 years. Jerome gained the jesting title of 'World's Fastest Man' as he broke records in the 100 meter, 60 meter and 100 yard dash. During the Commonwealth Games in Australia, Jerome encountered a devastating near career ending injury. Due to a torn thigh muscle, Jerome was unable to finish his race. After dealing with numerous negative comments made by the media following his disincentive, Jerome rebounded and received a bronze medal in the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. Harry Jerome was inducted into the Canada Athletics Hall of Fame in memorial in 2012.

Despite racial differences and hardships within the past 150 years, many Black Canadians were strong and able to overcome this obstacle to change the course of history. The 24th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, the first black female in provincial legislature as well as the record setting athletes is only a small image to young Canadians on how the achievements and accomplishments of people of colour have helped to change and shape the future. The significance of Black Canadians is indisputable.

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